



THE MARSHALL APPROACH

The Battle Command Training Program and 21st-century Leader Development

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Remember this: the truly great leader overcomes all difficulties, and campaigns and battles are nothing but a long series of difficulties to be overcome . . . the real leader displays his quality in his triumphs over adversity, however great it may be.

—General George Marshall¹

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PHOTO: Lieutenant George C. Marshall at Leavenworth, Kansas, c. 1908 (Courtesy of the George C. Marshall Research Library, Lexington, Virginia. GCMRL # 1505)

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING an army can do to prepare for war in an era of persistent conflict is develop agile and adaptive leaders capable of engaging across the spectrum of conflict and who are equally at home on the tactical battlefield, the strategic headquarters, or the halls of government. This is no small task and can only be accomplished with a combination of education, training, and experience. It cannot happen by accident. A career that encompasses all the requisite components should be deliberately cultivated in officers with promise. The obvious historical example of the application and product of this kind of leader development was General George C. Marshall: chief of staff of the Army during World War II, rebuilder of postwar Europe, secretary of defense, secretary of state, and Nobel Peace Prize winner. His credentials as both Soldier and statesman are sterling.

What was unique about his career path that prepared General Marshall for the extraordinary challenges of his generation? From the outset of his career he was consistently exposed to a level of leadership and training above the grade in which he was assigned. He was known for his organizational expertise, ability to identify and groom leaders, and forming and sustaining relationships with civilian leaders. Marshall was a product of a diverse series of assignments that included serving as an aide-de-camp and chiefs of staff at division and above and at various tactical and training commands.

The BCTP Assignment

Where do you find the opportunity in today's high-tempo environment to build on existing education and develop an appreciation for the complexities of leadership at the next level of command and beyond? One assignment that stands out in its ability to afford an officer the opportunity to grow and develop is the Combined Arms Center's Battle Command Training Program (BCTP). BCTP has the mission to develop current, relevant, campaign-quality, Joint, and expeditionary battle command instincts and skills in senior commanders. BCTP does this at all levels—Army service

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component command, corps, Joint task force, division, and brigade. An assignment to BCTP offers a unique, professionally broadening experience that encompasses three broad categories: professional study, exposure to multiple echelons of command at brigade and above, and mentoring by the Army's senior leadership.

Having the time to conduct professional study and inquiry is essential to leader development. BCTP provides that in several ways. First, it is a place to become intimately acquainted with current Army doctrine. Second, it exposes officers to Army training methodology and exercise design. Third, it provides officers an opportunity to complete an advanced degree. And finally, it allows officers to remain engaged with units deploying to combat by conducting theater reconnaissance with deploying units and participating in battle command seminars linked to theater commanders. Let's look at each of these developmental opportunities in turn.

Doctrine

Between World War I and World War II, General Marshall was instrumental in reviewing doctrine and capturing the lessons learned from directing the publication of *Infantry In Battle* in 1939, the main reference used to train Infantry Officers during World War II.² An assignment in BCTP affords the opportunity to review existing doctrine and review and contribute to emerging doctrine and practices. Each operations group provides a robust certification program designed to produce an observer trainer who is grounded in current doctrine and able to lead discussions with our senior officers in brigade to Army service component command formations. Resident at Fort Leavenworth, the intellectual center of the Army, BCTP shares a close relationship with the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate (CADD). In every exercise, officers from CADD accompany an operations group to view and develop the latest doctrine from observations of current practices. BCTP officers routinely review draft doctrinal publications to add insights gained from the multiple exercise experiences. This immersion in doctrine is a key component in the development of a BCTP officer. However, it is not just Army doctrine that is studied. Officers in BCTP are continuously involved in professional forums through the Battle Command Knowledge Network and publication in professional journals.

Training Exercises

Developing mission rehearsal exercises or war-fighter exercises is a time-consuming endeavor that requires continuous study of the operational environment, understanding of commander's training objectives and end state, and an agile and creative thought process geared toward developing a training strategy that achieves the end state. The standard model for an mission rehearsal exercise entails a "5-2-5" structure: five days of exercise, a mid-exercise after-action review and two-day pause, and then five additional days of exercise. This sequence does not include planning and intelligence scripting conferences required to plan, prepare, and execute the exercise. These planning conferences are another opportunity for professional interaction. With the Unified Endeavor series of exercises, the Joint Warfighting Center out of Suffolk, Virginia, has planning and execution oversight. These conferences afford BCTP officers a unique experience in developing a working relationship with our sister services. This "Jointness" adds to the officer's education and experience and builds a foundation for Joint tours in the future.

Advanced Degrees

In the process of designing exercises, BCTP officers are fully exposed to the concept of a "training strategy." BCTP officers witness the evolution of the unit's training objectives. Additionally, they help design the exercise that will assist the commander in achieving his objectives and end state. Participating in this process for multiple commands adds to the education of future battalion and brigade commanders in the art and science of training.

Throughout his career, General Marshall was able to take advantage of assignments that allowed him to advance his education. After serving in the Philippines and the United States, he attended and graduated with honors from the Infantry-Cavalry School in 1907 and the Army Staff College in 1908.³ Similarly, officers assigned to BCTP are afforded an opportunity to complete an advanced degree. A predictable training calendar—coupled with a plethora of on-line and resident graduate-level degree programs—provides officers an opportunity to take courses while performing their duties. Every spring and fall, numerous officers assigned to BCTP earn their advanced degrees.

Engaging With Units

Observing how units perform full spectrum operations offers another aspect of education and inquiry. Although almost every officer assigned to BCTP has been deployed in support of current operations, it is a rare experience to be able to observe a unit deployed or in the process of training to deploy. Our observer trainers routinely accompany deploying units on leader recons to ongoing conflicts. They have access to all warfighting functions and staff processes. A leader's recon is one of the best methods to not only see how a unit operates but also to develop a situational understanding relevant to realistic training events for units participating in an mission rehearsal exercise. Within an operations group, the observer trainers break down by warfighting functions. Each warfighting function chief attends battle rhythm events with his or her counterpart on the division or corps staff on these leader's recons. In many cases, they see how the officers interact with the division's senior leaders. They witness, firsthand, battle command executed at a level where their peers have likely only read about.

As with General Marshall's experiences, BCTP officers are similarly exposed to varied Army formations. During a single year in BCTP, an officer has the opportunity to participate in exercises at every level of command from brigade to Joint task force. A common pattern could include at least two division-level mission rehearsal exercises, a corps mission rehearsal exercise, a division warfighter exercise, an Army service component command exercise and a Joint task force exercise involving the divisional headquarters as the Joint headquarters. In every mission rehearsal exercise, there is at least one embedded multi-functional or sustainment brigade. In the last division warfighter exercise, BCTP also trained a combined aviation brigade, a fires brigade, and a sustainment brigade all in a multinational environment. The exposure to these levels of command in our Army cannot fail to register the complexities that come with all aspects of a senior level headquarters. At the division level and above, a headquarters is capable of planning along three horizons simultaneously. As doctrine provides a sound basis for operations, these higher-level command formations depart comfortably from prescribed doctrine to evolve into organizations that enable their battle commanders to understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess.

There are few other assignments where an officer has the opportunity to experience this practice in multiple iterations, learning the nuances of personality and leadership. Where else in our Army do we provide an officer with an environment to learn about future assignments at the next level?

Mentoring

Potentially the greatest benefit of an assignment to BCTP is the opportunity for mentoring from senior Army leaders. Mentoring can come from several directions. An assignment to BCTP opens a window and exposes an officer to several new sources of mentoring. A large grouping of senior leaders is common to every exercise. Throughout the life cycle of an exercise, officers are continuously interacting and developing relationships with senior officers. BCTP is famous for the pool of senior mentors who have assisted in training division and corps commanders for the last two and a half decades. Each exercise will also have an exercise director, normally appointed by the U.S. Army Forces Command commander, as the senior two- to three-star level officer who helps guide the exercise design. He ensures that, as the mission rehearsal exercise unfolds, systems and organizations are built to support the training audience in achieving their training objectives. Interaction with the commanding general and his deputy commanders and the senior staff in the training unit also offer insights and opportunities. Finally, there is the often-overlooked experience of mentoring from peers that occurs on a daily basis.

The BCTP is supported by a group of senior mentors who team with the operations groups. The senior mentor is a key player in the evolution of a formation as it moves from notification for a deployment through their mission rehearsal exercise and beyond. The senior mentor, in coordination with the operations group commander and his team, works closely with the training audience headquarters in developing the plan, the "road to war." The senior mentors, all retired senior generals, have commanded at every echelon in our force up through corps. During the conduct of an mission rehearsal exercise or warfighter exercise, the entire operations group meets daily with the senior mentor to discuss the challenges and successes of the training audience. The senior mentors, with their knowledge

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base and experience, help frame observer trainer observations in the context of battle command. The senior mentors are also a tremendous resource for officer professional development. Usually one of the senior mentors will host a development event for the operations group at the conclusion of the exercise. These events are rare opportunities to gain insights from senior leaders with well over 30 years of experience.

No other assignment provides an officer the first-hand opportunity to observe and learn battle command at the highest echelons. Officers in BCTP observe the actions and leadership of senior officers, learning how they interact amongst themselves and their staffs. With the complexity of the current operating environments, unit staffs are being asked to expand their work in warfighter functions to include the myriad tasks associated with stability operations. Such complexity benefits from oversight by flag officer expertise. Observer trainers witness the “describe and direct” aspects of battle command at the highest echelons.

An operations group consists of officers who are experts in their particular war fighting function. Much like the environment in an intermediate-level education or a senior-service classroom, the peer-to-peer interaction across warfighter function experiences is a key component to building a professional officer. As officers in a particular warfighter function grow in their specific field—doctrinally and through studying tactics techniques and procedures—they find themselves routinely interacting with the other warfighter function members of the operations group. As they develop exercise design scenarios and track staff actions during the execution of the mission rehearsal exercise, such growth occurs. Cross-fertilization of the branches and warfighter function continues to build professional development at a higher level of understanding than most other assignments.

BCTP Benefits

The goal of a two- or three-year assignment at BCTP is a broadly educated officer who returns to warfighting formations well versed in the most current doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures, and with a better understanding and appreciation of how our Army trains and fights. The BCTP worldwide mission provides an officer the opportunity to experience various stateside and overseas locations as well. BCTP families enjoy the work predictability and have the time to enjoy participating in the varied activities the Army’s premier installations and communities offer. A BCTP assignment provides the Army with an officer possessing unique knowledge and experience for future growth. The professional development derived from being securely grounded in doctrine, yet able to work easily in a Joint, multinational, and interagency environment is exactly what our senior leaders are asking for in our current capstone manuals. Commanders recommend a BCTP assignment to those officers who possess the potential for service at the highest echelons, similar to how General Marshall identified and groomed the leaders that led the nation through World War II. The mentoring available to an officer in BCTP is nearly limitless. An officer assigned to BCTP has access and constant interaction with operations group commanders up to our Army’s most senior recently retired officers.

At the turn of 20th century, then Lieutenant Marshall was commanding an outpost on an isolated Philippine Island. He was not aware of the challenges he would encounter and the impacts his career would have on our nation and the free world. His career was unique in the sense that he was exposed to senior officers and a constant forum for professional development during the early stages of his career. The opportunities for development in BCTP are not exactly those that General Marshall experienced, but they provide a Marshall-like experience that cannot fail to develop our leaders for the future. **MR**

NOTES

1. James Charlton, *The Military Quotation Book* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002).
2. Wikipedia, *George Marshall* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Marshall> (GNU Free Documentation License).
3. Karl Grandin, *Les Prix Nobel* (Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, 1953).